

the Northeast is experiencing an unusually cold winter, this bill cuts funding for the Northeast Heating Oil Reserve from \$8 million to \$6 million.

Under the cuts imposed by the administration and the majority here in Congress, the Department of Housing and Urban Development will provide housing services to fewer families and communities will suffer. These cuts come on top of HUD's recently announced plans to cut its operating support for public housing authorities by as much as 30 percent. In letters to the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, I have urged the administration to work with Congress to meet the Nation's housing priorities. Unfortunately, this appropriations bill is simply not adequate.

I am also disappointed that this legislation cuts funding for the Federal FIRE grant initiative from \$900 million in the previously approved Senate bill to \$750 million in this final bill. FIRE grants provide local firefighters with absolutely essential equipment and training. I firmly believe the FIRE grant program should have been fully funded. Now more than ever, the Federal Government should be striving to be an effective partner with cities and towns across the country.

Unfortunately, this final bill reduced funding not only for the FIRE grants, but for a myriad of other homeland security activities. In total, this final omnibus bill cuts nearly \$4.5 billion in homeland security spending from the fiscal year 2003 bills written by the Senate Appropriations Committee last year. Homeland security spending was cut in order to stay within the President's spending limits—limits that were imposed not because domestic spending is out of control, but because we have cut tax revenue irresponsibly. At a time when the Federal Government is running record deficits, we are being asked to economize on the safety of local law enforcement, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, and the public.

This bill also fails to provide adequate funding to help state and local governments improve their election and balloting systems. The conference report provides \$1.5 billion for election and balloting modernization. This is a significant first step, but it is substantially below the amount authorized in the Help America Vote Act. I am concerned that state and local governments will not have the resources they need to prepare for the upcoming election and ensure that we do not have a repeat of the 2000 Presidential election fiasco. I am hopeful that we will find the additional resources necessary to make sure that every vote is accurately counted. I hope we will find the additional resources at the earliest opportunity.

In the end, I believe this bill reflects a very troubling attitude that seems to be taking hold here in Washington, which is to talk about helping working families, improving healthcare and

education, keeping our homeland safe, and other priorities, but not to do enough follow-through. The American people deserve better than that.

Again, I thank my colleague from Alaska. He fought hard on some of these issues. Unfortunately, we were not able to prevail as successfully as I hoped we could. But, I thank him publicly for his efforts, and I regret deeply we could not have held onto the Senate provisions during the conference negotiations.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska is recognized.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Connecticut for his nice comments. I can only say I regret deeply that I will not have the privilege he will have tonight, to go home to that beautiful young child. We know he protects children because of his great interest in children at this time.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed, according to the previous order, to the consideration of conference report to accompany H.J. Res. 2, that it be considered under the following limitation: 15 minutes under the control of Senator BOXER, 20 minutes between the chairman and ranking member of the Appropriations Committee; further, I ask that following the yielding back or use of the time, the Senate proceed to a vote on the adoption of the conference report with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. REID. Mr. President, reserving the right to object.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I withdraw the request.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, will the Senator from Alaska yield for a question?

Mr. STEVENS. Yes.

Mr. REID. Would the Senator allow the Senator from California to proceed with her part of the evening's debate?

Mr. STEVENS. Certainly.

Mrs. BOXER. I will be ready in a moment.

Mr. STEVENS. Is there some limitation?

Mr. REID. She is going to speak as I have indicated to the Senator.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to reiterate the request of the Senator from Alaska, absent the last paragraph, and Senator BOXER be recognized for up to 15 minutes.

Mr. STEVENS. That is all?

Mr. REID. Yes.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I am not ready to lay down the bill. I have no objection to the Senator having 15 minutes, as the rest of us have, in terms of morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair understands the Senator from California is to be recognized for 15 minutes and that is the only request.

Mr. STEVENS. That's correct.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from California is recognized.

NATIONAL FORESTS

Mrs. BOXER. I thank the Senator from Alaska. I also thank my friend from Nevada for the time.

Mr. President, normally I have fancy charts. I have not had time to develop those because we just saw some of the riders of the bill.

I take the floor to make the point that I have many problems with this bill in the area of homeland security—as we are told to take duct tape and plastic and get ready for a chemical or biological attack. God forbid. We have shorted homeland security in this bill. We have shorted port security as it relates to inspecting containers at the ports. We have shorted border security, firefighter grants, community policing grants; and in education, we are leaving many children behind. That breaks a promise to them.

To me, this bill is wanting in many ways. In the area of the environment, which I will talk about, brownfield cleanups have been reduced, and the meaning of organic meat has been turned on its head.

It breaks my heart to tell the Senate tonight that I think America's forests are under major attack. It is unbelievable to me that without any debate or discussion, a pilot program has been expanded massively and, in my opinion, it is going to lead to the ruination of our national forests—our forests that belong to the American people. The program I am talking about is called the Forest Stewardship Program, which started 3 years ago. The idea was to allow limited logging on national forest land for the purpose of maintaining healthy forests in accordance with the forest management plan. Now, as I said, this program has been massively extended.